

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 001644

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO FAA AND DOT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [FAIR](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON GHANA AIRWAYS CRISIS AND FAA SAFETY
REASSESSMENT

REF: A. STATE 160345

[B](#). STATE 168352

[C](#). ACCRA 1583

[D](#). ACCRA 1550

[E](#). BANJUL 518

Summary

1. (U) Ghana Air's management has finally gained some measure of control over the crisis that stranded up to 5,000 passengers in Ghana, the U.S. and The Gambia (see reftels A, C, D, E for background). The third repatriation flight, on wet-leased World Air, left August 9 for Baltimore (BWI). The passenger check-in process was calm and orderly, and Ghana Air published flight information and contacted ticket holders ahead of time. Two additional flights to New York/JFK are scheduled for August 11-14. Post has assisted irate and frustrated Amcits to get on the correct lists, procure over the counter medicines, and get in contact with the often unreachable Ghana Air staff. The Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) requested in writing that the FAA delay its safety reassessment mission until mid-October (Ref A). Transport Ministry, GCAA, and Ghana Air officials are planning an official trip to the U.S. to meet with USG agencies, although no date has been set. End Summary.

Ghana Air Passenger Repatriation

2. (U) Every Amcit in contact with Post to date has departed Ghana. This includes two children from Liberia who are being adopted by families in the U.S. The children were first-time travelers on Ghana Air, and were therefore rejected by Ghana Air staff holding to Department of Transportation's (DOT) orders that these flights were for returning passengers only. However, DOT, State and Post officers were able to get last minute authorization to Ghana Air and the children departed on the August 7 flight. Post is unlikely to receive many new requests for assistance because the remaining Amcits appear to have reached a sufficient comfort level with the repatriation process not to need Embassy support.

3. (U) The repatriation process got off to a rocky start on August 4. Ghana Air put out a public notice to passengers at the last minute, and only at Post's urging. Ghana Air managers also failed to get representatives out early to deal with long lines of passengers waiting to check-in, and then did not have adequate security on hand to deal with unhappy and confused passengers. Post's RSO had to call in 15-20 police he had pre-positioned nearby to calm the situation.

4. (U) Ghana Air Acting CEO Ms. Akua Sarpong and other Ghana Air managers seemed to learn from their mistakes, and are now disseminating information sooner and using more people to manage the check-in process and handle passenger inquiries. As a result, the August 7 and August 9 flights went smoothly. Sarpong assures Post that Ghana Air is planning additional repatriation flights this week, with the first one scheduled to depart August 11 for JFK, and the second flight to leave near the weekend, also en route JFK airport.

5. (SBU) Ms. Sarpong is concerned that the repatriation flight loads are down, and Ghana Air is nearing the point where it will not be economical to continue the wet-lease arrangement just for returning passengers. The flights from the U.S. are already only half full, and Sarpong expects this will also be the case by this coming weekend for return flights to Baltimore and New York. She hopes to reach some kind of accommodation from DOT in the near future to allow Ghana Air to fly newly ticketed passengers. Otherwise, Ghana Air will need to find cheaper means to return the few remaining stranded passengers, such as book them on other airlines through Europe.

More Trouble for Ghana Air

6. (SBU) Ghana Air's August 8 morning flight to London was abruptly canceled due to technical problems with its remaining DC-10. More than 50 stranded travelers besieged Ghana Air's headquarters and refused to let airline staff depart. Local press referred to it as a hostage situation,

but Ghana police and security forces, along with officials from the airline and Ministry of Roads and Transport, quickly defused the situation. According to Sarpong, Ghana Air has grounded the DC-10 indefinitely and is seeking other means of transporting the stranded passengers to London. (Comment: Ghana Air is negotiating with Jordanian Air to lease a Boeing 767 to handle its European routes. End Comment).

FAA Request to Assess GoG Safety Oversight

17. (SBU) Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) finally responded to Ref A demarche regarding the FAA request to perform a comprehensive reassessment of the GCAA's (and GoG's) safety oversight. Post has faxed the GCAA's written response to FAA Rep in Dakar and to Department. Although FAA asked to perform the reassessment within 45 days, GCAA Director General, Captain Joe Boachie, has requested a delay to mid October or later. He argues that the new Civil Aviation Law will redress many of the FAA's concerns, but Parliament will not meet to vote on it until early September. Under this timetable, the law would go into effect in late September. Boachie also points out that key GCAA personnel, whose presence would be required for the assessment, plan to attend the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Program and General Assembly meetings in Montreal, Canada, in September (Ref B).

GoG Official Visit to Washington

18. (SBU) Roads and Transport Minister Dr. Richard Anane has indicated a desire to head an official delegation to the U.S. to meet with State, DOT, and FAA officials. The purpose of the visit would be to arrange (or finalize) an agreement to allow Ghana Air to continue with regular service to the U.S., either by continuing with wet-leased aircraft or with its own aircraft. GCAA Director General Captain Joe Boachie and Ghana Air Acting CEO Ms. Akua Sarpong would accompany the Minister. Sarpong told Econoff August 10 that the visit is on hold pending discussions between Ghana Air's lawyers in the U.S. and DOT. (Comment: In conversations with Econoffs, Sarpong has informally requested assistance to improve safety standards at Ghana Air and also to get re-authorization to fly U.S. routes. Econoffs pointed out that Post is not the appropriate USG entity to handle such requests, and urged Sarpong to approach DOT and FAA directly with specific assistance requests. End Comment)

YATES